

H-1B Non-US Citizens & Faculty (Postdocs) Process

Overview

This document details the operational workflow for recruiting, appointing, and managing visa sponsorship for Postdoctoral Scholars (Postdocs). The workflow outlines the integration between academic systems (Interfolio, FIS, HCM) and federal immigration procedures (J-1 and H-1B statuses).

Postdoc Hiring & Systems Workflow

- **Requisition & Posting:** A Principal Investigator (PI) initiates a postdoc position in Interfolio. The posting requires sequential approval from the Department, School Finance Officer, and the Postdoc Office before going live publicly.
- **Selection & Training:** PIs and search committee members must complete mandatory Canvas video training on the screening and selection process. Search committees are optional depending on the department/PI preference.
- **Candidate Appointment:** Upon candidate selection, a record is created in Interfolio detailing bio/demo data, salary, and position details. The appointment request routes through the Department → School Finance Office → VISA Office (if international) → Postdoc Office for final approval.
- **Appointment Letters:** The Postdoc Office issues the official appointment letter (typically 1-year terms, renewable up to 5 years), which the candidate signs and returns.
- **Systems Integration:** Data flows from the Faculty Information System (FIS) / SIS into HCM. Any pay or status updates made in HCM feed back into FIS. All postdocs are paid employees, though funding sources vary.

Visa Processing for International Postdocs

Processing of visa status for International postdoc hires begin with a sponsorship request submitted to the VISA Office Scholar Portal by the hiring department's HRA or department assistant.

- **J-1 Visa Status (Most Common for Postdocs)**

- **Process:** Managed by the J-1 specialist upon receiving biographical, immigration status, and funding documentation. The specialist prepares and issues Form DS-2019 directly to the candidate.
- **USCIS not involved:** Does not require a USCIS petition; candidates apply directly for a visa stamp at a U.S. embassy/consulate if not already in the U.S.
- **Timelines:** Candidates already inside the U.S. for another institution in J-1 status require a transfer. This requires communication with the current employer and typically take a few weeks. Overseas hires face variable consular processing times, which can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months.
- **Duration & Conversion:** J-1 status for Postdocs is capped at 5 years. Postdocs reaching this limit with a continuing appointment at CWRU must change status to H-1B (typically filed at least 6 months prior to expiry) or depart the U.S., which may trigger a 2-year home residence requirement.
- **H-1B Visa Status**
 - **Process:** Same as staff process. Requires posting of a Notice of Filing, filing a Labor Condition Application (LCA) with the Department of Labor, then filing of an H-1B petition with USCIS.
 - **Timelines:** Generally takes 2 to 3 months, if premium processed. Most H-1B applicants are already residing inside the United States.

Recruitment Cycle & Benefits

- **Hiring Cycle & Flexibility:** Postdoc hiring operates on a continuous 12-month cycle outside the academic calendar, with hiring peaks following commencement periods (June, July, and January). Because grant work is fluid, start dates can be delayed several months for visa issues, though departments may cancel if delays become unreasonable.
- **Benefits & Insurance:** For Benefits purposes, Postdoc Fellows and Postdoc Scholars (and dependents) are eligible for benefits or retirement plans offered through Gallagher Benefit Services. The level of benefits that can be offered are dependent upon specific funding sources for either a fellow or a scholar. Postdocs Scholars remain eligible for paid parental leave and FMLA. Postdoc Scholars are classified as employees and are eligible for standard university staff benefits or retirement plans.

- Note: Postdoc scholars are eligible for Paid Parental Leave and FMLA. Postdoc fellows are also eligible for Paid Parental Leave but do not qualify for leave under the FMLA. Neither Postdoc scholars nor Postdoc fellows are eligible for all benefits offered to staff members. For retirement purposes, both Postdoc scholars and Postdoc fellows can only contribute to their own retirements without additional funding from the university.

Revised by the Offices of the Provost, Office of Postdocs, Human Resources, and VISA office, October 12, 2026